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Abstract

Even within the common goal of teaching youth to read, teachers in inner-city secondary schools should be concerned with variation and differentiation in program emphasis for a specific school. An all-school reading survey might be used to determine student ability, achievement, and interests and to give direction in establishing a program suited to needs within the school. Instructional strategies based on survey results should contain the elements of (1) task analysis, determining subskills to be taught to a class and the performance to be expected; (2) observation of reading performance, developing sensitivity to cues indicating change in student performance; and (3) response analysis, using data and information collected through sources such as surveys and observations to evaluate, suggest changes, and make improvements in programs. Inner-city secondary students should profit from this kind of program, since it is a deliberate skills approach implemented by diagnostic teaching. References are included. (MD)

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Secondary Reading in the Inner-City of the Ghetto

Session: Teaching the Disadvantaged
(May 2, 1969 2:15 - 3:15 p.m.)

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Prologue

"Why try? We are ghetto kids! We go to inner-city schools! Our teachers have us pigeon-holed, but for the most part they have not tried to find out much about us...that is, any of the good things, the right things, any of the things that make us the way we are. They say that we have no backgrounds, no experiences; but we live everyday and have survived for fourteen or more years...so we have to have had some experiences, and we have to have had some intelligence although neither has served us well in schools--many of us don't even read well. They say that we do not wish to know,

cannot understand, what the schools are trying to teach us... this may be true, but we need to be able to read; and we do want something out of life. They say that we are problems with a capital "P"...well, so are they. We can tell by their actions that they don't trust us, that they are afraid of us and so...they must maintain control at any cost; at the cost of our self-respect through sarcasm, through mishandling, through suspensions; at the cost of our learning by wasting time--wasting time trying to maintain control..."

The Challenge: Implications for Teachers of Reading

How are teachers of reading going to respond to this clearly-stated plea of youth in inner-city, ghetto schools? Teaching reading in secondary schools of the ghetto presents both challenge and opportunity to reading professionals: teachers, advisory and supervisory personnel; challenge to build viable, unified reading programs in inner-city secondary schools; Opportunity to guide the inner-city youth toward maturity in reading. Insofar as reading is concerned, this challenge has not yet been met, nor have opportunities to profit from good teaching been realized by many of these youths. On the other hand, much has been accomplished in terms of describing, categorizing and further delineating problems, deficiencies and limitations of inner-city ghetto youth. Volumes have been published, documented at some length and in some detail concerning those cultural, community and individual aspects of the lives of these youth said to negatively influence their ability to read and to learn. Even more has been reported

outlining and describing special programs for these youth: summer programs, compensatory programs, remedial programs, on and on ad infinitum. But many of these efforts have not effectively raised the levels of reading competence of ghetto youth. Perhaps other goals have been achieved, but demonstrated competence in reading presents, yet, a challenge to inner-city educational institutions.

Let us by-pass, at this time, a discussion of the inner-city youth as a learner; let us not focus upon his culture, nor his community; but let us center our attention upon effective reading instruction for this learner, and some ideas about teaching reading. In passing, however, one must take note of the fact that while there exist common conditions of low economic status with the consequent sociological and psychological life patterns, ghetto populations are comprised of a mélange of minority, and/or ethnic groups, each with a separate set of mores, values and the like. Further, the fact of poorness may not cause various communities within the inner-city to evidence total commonality in life-style. This is important because when considering reading instruction for ghetto youth, it seems clear that there will need to be variation and differentiation in particular emphases within a given school reading program--even as separate ghetto schools strive toward the common goal of teaching the youth to read. If this is true, then some strategies must be devised as means for achieving this common goal. The apparent and not-so-apparent variations among inner-city learners suggest advantages in the use of instructional

strategies instead of an indiscriminate use of packaged instructional media or the perennial use of inflexible, single-focus methods and techniques of instruction. The effectiveness of instructional strategies with inner-city youth depends upon a competent reading teacher who can employ, in terms of a given situation, a workable combination of organizational schema, approaches, techniques and materials to achieve reading objectives which have been clearly defined. Implications which may be drawn from the ideas expressed here are: (1) some of the relatively low achievement in reading among ghetto learners has its genesis in lack of teacher expertise, and (2) some degree of mastery in teaching on the part of the reading teacher is not merely desirable in inner-city schools, it is essential.

Historically, problems of staffing inner-city schools has prohibited, by and large, the establishment of a unified, committed group of teachers who could rationally conceive of their roles as teachers in this type of school. Characteristically, teachers in such schools are temporary--substitutes, probationary, and sometimes even rejects from schools in more desirable areas. Typically more competent personnel seek transfer as early as is practicable such that teacher turnover in these schools rivals that of students. All too often these teachers find themselves consciously or unconsciously diverted from the implementation of objectives, which if achieved, would lead to academic achievement. These diversions stem not only from student behavior, but often from administrative dicta and are reflected in teacher behaviors which are directed primarily

at "control and discipline" of the student population. It would seem that in such behaviors there is an implicit fear and mistrust of the ghetto learner. What is more desirable, of course, is trust and confidence on the part of the learner which may be engendered through objective, competent, professional guidance of the learner toward behaviors which reflect concern for independence in study and thought; concern for knowledge of relevant skills which are immediately useful and applicable. Consequently, the particular direction to be taken in this discussion is an approach to the development of instructional skill as a starting point for relating positively to inner-city secondary youth...where the energies of teachers need not be devoted to "student control," but where they may be channeled toward mastery in teaching--devising appropriate organizational structures, selecting appropriate activities and materials which will promote development of reading skills among inner-city youth.

Conceptual Bases for Reading Programs

An adequate understanding of the process, a firm theoretical base in terms of psychological and pedagogical foundations of reading instruction, will serve as an immeasurable aid in developing security and competence among inner-city reading teachers that can be translated to learners in the form of clearly-defined achievement goals and related activities. What is involved here? Why is it necessary that teachers be well-acquainted with reading as a process? It is difficult to

implement a reading program unless there is some agreement among staff as to what reading is. It is from this point of reference that the reading program in a given school takes its form. For example, if staff and administrators view the reading process as developmental, energies will be directed at developing an all-school reading program, at securing adequately-trained reading teachers in sufficient numbers as determined by a survey of student needs. Where a secondary school can describe its population as 60% remedial, 15% corrective, and 25% developmental, there is strong evidence that the reading program should not be supplemental, but an integral part of the total curriculum. On the other hand, if the reading process is viewed as essentially mechanical, efforts toward increased reading competence may take the form of a supplemental program and the adoption of instructional media with an orientation toward decoding. When staff, responsible for structuring a reading program, possesses understanding of the reading process and can reach some agreement as to the conceptual bases upon which the program will be structured, the resultant rationale will, in turn, direct and influence curricular arrangements and instructional objectives for that reading program. It is proposed here, that whatever conceptual base or rationale is operative, the overwhelming incidence of reading disability among inner-city youth demands a reading program wherein reading instruction is offered as a regular part of the standard curriculum. In the schools serving these youth, reading is not to be viewed as merely a supplemental, remedial service.

Instructional Strategies

Let us assume a commitment on the part of the school to establish a reading program, wherein all students will be offered classes in reading at some point early in the high school sequence. We may then assume the assignment of not more than twenty students per class. Let us further assume that in initiating the all-school reading program, that after a reading committee is formed, consisting of reading personnel, representatives from each department and representatives from administration, a survey of student reading abilities is made. This survey makes use of a carefully-selected standardized silent reading test, then uses randomly-selected samples of students to investigate oral reading skills, and relevant, non-reading areas where a variety of inventories, questionnaires, cumulative records and the like are employed. Finally, assuming the existence of reading classes, let us raise the question as to procedures to be used in determining the "skills-base" already possessed by learners in these classes, hence providing a point of departure for devising instructional strategies which might operate effectively among a particular group of learners.

Should an instructional program for secondary level youth be based upon strengths or deficits in learner reading competence, or both? For obvious reasons, procedures in the classroom are somewhat less than clinical. However, inherent in this concept of "instructional strategies" is that the teacher devising such strategies must understand what skills the learner shows some

acquaintance with and/or mastery of, as well as an understanding of the kinds of reading tasks with which the learner has had no conscious experience. Ultimately it is the teacher of reading who must assume the responsibility for the identification of learners who evidence inhibited development toward maturity in reading, but it is suggested that instruction of these learners should proceed from a recognition of a "skills-bank" possessed by the learner. For example, it is insufficient to say that a student cannot comprehend material of a given level of difficulty. There are less than enough clues in this statement upon which to base clearly-defined instructional objectives. Similarly the issue remains clouded when the determination is made that a learner has not performed well on a given reading vocabulary measure. A more useful and realistic assessment will need to identify the particular combination of reading skills which the learner has applied in performing a reading task at a supposedly comfortable level of complexity. If the combination of skills necessary for successful completion of the reading task is known, then the teacher is in a position to determine if the learner has appropriately selected and applied these skills to the task. Through observation of the response to the task, evidence is provided as to whether instruction is needed for one or more of the reading skills embraced by this "skills-complex."

Surface exploration of the ideas presented above would reveal three essential elements which appear basic to the notion of "instructional strategy." They are: (1) task

analysis, (2) sensitive observation of reading performances and (3) response analysis.

Task Analysis

The focus of task analysis is upon immediate sub-skills, used in combination for reading materials of known levels of complexity for given purposes. This is reading technique. A task analysis involves making a prior determination of the sub-skills needed by the reader to achieve success. Further, such an analysis will require a determination of expected performance, stated in behavioral terms, for purposes of deciding if none, some, or all of the skills are applied. For example, a task in the vocabulary skills area may require or permit the use of context, or structural analysis, or both in determining the meaning of a word which is probably unfamiliar. Given a paragraph, where the context is familiar and where the unknown word can be subjected to analysis, structurally, how should the learner behave if context is used exclusively? His behavior would depend upon the nature of the contextual clue--use of a synonym, an antonym, a direct definition given, an example made--and so on. How should the learner behave if the word is subjected to structural analysis exclusively? Does he understand the function of certain suffix classes? Is he familiar with the root of the word? If he does not know the root, will he use contextual clues to help with its meaning, then apply knowledge of affixes to yield enough information for the sentence or paragraph to make sense? Similar task analyses can

be made of activities planned for instruction of comprehension skills, or word recognition skills, or for comprehensive tasks requiring application of specific skills from each area mentioned. In addition, activities so planned, may be structured on easy or difficult material as is appropriate for a particular learner. Modes of presentation will and should vary dependent upon the nature of the intra-class organizational scheme.

When employing instructional strategies, through a task analysis approach, the theme is variation and flexibility for both teacher and learner. The learner must be expected to consciously and consistently match his own reading skills to the complex of skills required by the reading material when reading for a given purpose. While this is true, the reading teacher must possess a solid core of knowledge and understanding of the reading process which will permit presentation of the kinds of activities, appropriately varied, with properly-selected materials in terms of level of difficulty and interest of content designed to promote reasonable progress toward competence in reading.

Observation of Reading Performances

Since criterion behaviors are defined at the point of making the analysis of the reading tasks or skills embraced within a certain activity, observation of the reading performance, or of products of the performance, is made in terms of expectations as set forth. At the same time, it is expected that a trained teacher of reading will be sensitive to reading

behaviors which give evidence of strengths or weaknesses in reading skills other than those being specifically observed. The kinds of observation to be made will depend, to an extent, upon the mode of presentation of the stimulus material, but probably more upon the response demanded of the learner. Naturally it is expected that all activities, or stimulus material, will require the learner to read. However, the reading task may follow taped or live auditory presentations, filmed presentations, real events, or combinations of these. Responses may be oral and/or written as direct reactions or they may become evident only through application to a reading related task. Some tasks will require that the teacher make on-the-spot observations, thereby immediately responding to certain cues. Other evaluations may be delayed such as where written responses are checked and evaluated at a later time. Of course, it is expected that notes or records be maintained for each student, both by teacher and learner.

Probably the master key to the effective use of observation of reading performances for purposes of evaluating reading behaviors is the sensitivity of the reading teacher to significant cues — such cues as are noted while responses are being made or cues from the evaluation of products resulting directly from the required reading task. This is a second crucial point at which the real responsibility for learning rests with the reading teacher because rarely can the learner himself adequately evaluate his performance such that strengths and weaknesses can be identified and used as the bases for further instruction.

Response Analysis

Once reading performances have been observed and expected behaviors noted in terms of the tasks given and/or unexpected taken into account, what is to be done with the information collected? It is suggested that these data are used to make subsequent instructional decisions. Decisions may be made about: (1) the adequacy of the total reading performance, (2) skills-strengths which permitted successful completion of the reading tasks, (3) skills-deficits which prohibited adequate completion of reading tasks, (4) whether deficiencies noted can be repaired immediately through special, supplemental activities, or (5) whether deficiencies noted reflect more basic inadequacies, thereby requiring further probing and analysis through further diagnostic-instructional measures. These decisions, once made, are useful for planning flexible, varied instructional programs which focus upon specific skills and sub-skills to be applied in numerous reading situations and with interest-oriented materials. Finally, through the use of such decisions, tasks of increasing complexity may be introduced to the learner at a pace that is comfortable for the learner, ...le, at the same time, insuring some degree of success at each endeavor.

For inner-city secondary students, a deliberate skills approach, implemented through diagnostic teaching, should produce marked increase in reading achievement by any standards. Such a program, however, should be initiated and staffed by a department of reading teachers, as well as by special reading

personnel who serve in advisory and supervisory capacities. Standardized test results may be employed as gross indications for initial class planning, but need not serve as a sole criterion for success in reading. Strategies which lend themselves to on-going diagnoses through instructional procedures ought become operative at the point of class formation. In this way instructional objectives for a given student or group of students are clearly defined for both teacher and learner. This is essential, for learners in ghetto situations must be helped to understand what it is he is trying to master. It is imperative that he is kept actively engaged, through planned activities, in seeking his own goals in terms of mastery of reading skills.

More often than not, attention has been directed toward learners who populate inner-city schools. This is as it must be, for in order to engage in effective teaching, there must be thorough understanding of the learner, incisive knowledge of his attributes as well as his shortcomings; then--somehow, school goals must relate to the ghetto community. It is time, now, for the professional educator to take a closer look at the educational institution as it functions in this regard.

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